

## Appropriations Committee Hearing on HB #6380

Friday, March 4, 2011

Chairs and Members of the Appropriations committee, thank you for hearing this testimony regarding HB 6380 recommending the dissolution of BESB.

You will hear testimony on various reasons why this is not favored option to resolving the budget crisis. Some of this testimony will discuss how this proposal looks good on paper, but in fact will not save money due to the vast amount of resources shared among the various divisions at BESB. When divided among agencies, these resources would need to be replicated, which cancels the initial savings found in the elimination of 4 positions.

I would like to focus my testimony on long term increase in costs this move would create. Please let me explain.

I was a teacher for the blind and visually impaired in rural Virginia for 20 years. In most locations, educational services were the responsibility of the individual counties. The state attempted to provide preschool, VR, and O&M services. Due to staff shortages and the immense geographical area of the state, services to my area were minimal at best.

The state was able to provide items to districts that were purchased with APH quota funds. These included books, tape recorders, and supplemental teaching materials. It did not include embossers, Braille notetakers, scanners, screen magnification, or Braille related software.

This required the Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) to ~~either~~ petition the school system for these funds. Since children with blindness/low vision are a 'low incident population', schools were hesitant to spend money on one or two students when the money could benefit a larger population, such as the learning impaired. In locations where funds were not to be found, the teacher could solicit the public or the student did without.

Orientation and Mobility services were hard to come by unless the teacher was also certified in this area. Students often did not meet a vocational rehabilitation counselor until they were 16 or 17.

What was the effect of this delivery model? Most students from rural locations were not ready for college or the work environment. Career expectations were extremely low. If a student in these areas made it to college, s/he still had the challenge of job placement upon graduation. One student from our area graduated with a political science degree and ended up working as a phone customer service representative at J. Crew.

How do these outcomes cost the state more money? These children do not become gainfully employed. As a result, they contribute little if any to the local and state tax coffers. In fact, ~~since~~ a large number these students stayed home after high school and collected disability. Therefore they became a drain on the system rather than a contributor.

Connecticut has an agency that provides for the needs of the blind and visually impaired citizens of the state. Would we like to continue to provide the support that allows these individuals to be productive citizens or would we like to pay for the long term maintenance of individuals who cannot financially contribute to the state? I sincerely hope the committee considers this question and supports the first scenario.

Thank you.

Faith Horter

Faith Horter, Wethersfield

860-798-7872